

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 3085

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT PDEV PGOV LE SY
SUBJ: TALK OF A LEBANESE "BROAD NATIONAL FRONT"

REF: DAMASCUS 3810

1. SUMMARY. UNDER SYRIAN SPONSORSHIP, KAMAL SHATILA, LEADER OF THE NASSERIST "UNION OF THE WORKING PEOPLE'S FORCES" HAS LAUNCHED A "BROAD NATIONAL FRONT." SHATILA'S "FRONT" ESSENTIALLY IS AN EFFORT TO CREATE A NEW MOSLEM-LEFTIST COALITION AS AN "INTERLOCUTOR VALABLE" FOR THE "KFUR" OR "LEBANESE FRONT," ALTHOUGH ITS PRINCIPLES AND PRETENSES SUPPOSEDLY ARE OPEN TO THE FULL SPECTRUM OF LEBANESE POLITICS, EVEN THE PARTIES OF THE KFUR FRONT. IT SEEMS LIKELY TO FAIL. MEANWHILE, INDIGENOUS LEBANESE EFFORTS TO FORM A UNITED MOSLEM-LEFTIST FRONT AFTER THE DEATH OF KAMAL JUMBLATT FOUNDER ON THE QUESTION OF ADMISSION OF THE MOST RADICAL LEFTISTS. END SUMMARY.

2. FOLLOWING IS A BRIEF ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY ON RECENT POLITICAL TRENDS IN WEST BEIRUT. A FULLER
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ANALYSIS IS BEING SENT TO ADDRESSEES BY AIRGRAM.

3. EVEN BEFORE THE DEATH OF KAMAL JUMBLATT, THE GRAND MUFTI IN NOVEMBER 1976 CALLED A "CONGRESS OF NATIONALIST FORCES" WHICH ATTEMPTED TO UNITE LEBANON'S TRADITIONAL MOSLEM POLITICAL LEADERS AND THE JUMBLATTI NATIONAL MOVEMENT. MOST TRADITIONAL MOSLEMS, NOTABLY

SAEB SALAM, BOYCOTTED THE PROCEEDINGS BECAUSE THE MURABITUN AND OTHER LEFTISTS (BUT NOT THE COMMUNISTS) PARTICIPATED. AFTER KAMAL JUMBLATT'S ASSASSINATION, RACHID KARAME AND SAEB SALAM BOTH BEGAN EFFORTS TO ORGANIZE A NEW MOSLEM-LEFTIST UNITED FRONT AND FILL THE VACUUM. KARAME TOOK THE POSITION THAT LEFTISTS, EVEN THE COMMUNISTS, SHOULD BE INCLUDED, WHILE SAEB SALAM CONTINUES TO REFUSE TO DEAL WITH THE MORE RADICAL LEFTISTS. WALID JUMBLATT, MEANWHILE, EQUIVOCATED ON THE FUTURE PARTICIPATION OF THE COMMUNISTS IN WHAT IS LEFT OF HIS FATHER'S NATIONAL MOVEMENT.

4. THE SYRIANS APPARENTLY TRIED TO TEMPT WALID JUMBLATT WITH AN OFFER OF LEADERSHIP OF A "BROAD NATIONAL FRONT" WHEN HE VISITED DAMASCUS IN MID-MAY. WALID SUGGESTED RAYMOND EDDE INSTEAD, ALTHOUGH HE DID AGREE TO A JOINT PSP PRO-SYRIAN BAATH PARTY COMMITTEE. THE SYRIANS DECIDED TO GO AHEAD USING KAMAL SHATILA, WHO ONCE HAD BEEN A PRO-EGYPTIAN NASSERIST, BUT HAS IN THE COURSE OF THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR BECOME COMPLETELY SUBSERVIENT TO THE SYRIANS. IN EARLY JUNE, SHATILA LAUNCHED A CAMPAIGN TOGETHER WITH ASSEM KANSO'S BAATH PARTY TO FORM A BROAD NATIONAL FRONT, EXCLUDING NO POLITICAL GROUPS AT ALL.

5. AT A RALLY PACKED WITH SYRIANS ON JUNE 12 AND AT A
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PRESS CONFERENCE ON JUNE 16, SHATILA OUTLINED THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE FRONT: HE CALLED FOR CLOSE DEFENSE COOPERATION AMONG LEBANON, SYRIA, AND JORDAN. HE WOULD HAVE THE CAIRO ACCORD APPLIED BY AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE GOL AND THE PLO, AND FAVORED USE OF ADF TROOPS TO ESTABLISH SECURITY IN SOUTH LEBANON. SHATILA STRESSED LEBANON'S ARAB IDENTITY, SAYING THAT THE ENEMIES OF THE ARABS AND OF LEBANON WERE THE SAME, AND THAT THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE "IS A LEBANESE CAUSE." HE MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE CALLED FOR ACTUAL UNIFICATION OF LEBANON AND SYRIA (REPORTS VARY), BUT THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT AT LEAST HE CALLED FOR "THE HIGHEST DEGREE OF COORDINATION BETWEEN LEBANON AND THE ARAB NATIONS, ESPECIALLY WITH SYRIA."

6. REACTION TO SHATILA'S PROPOSED FRONT IN LEBANON HAS BEEN DISTINCTLY UNENTHUSIASTIC. SEVERAL MINOR LEFTIST PARTIES AGREED TO JOIN, BUT THE MURABITUN AND THE PSP TOOK THE ATTITUDE THAT, SHOULD THE FRONT ADOPT ALL THE PRINCIPLES OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT THERE WOULD BE NO NEED FOR IT, AND SHOULD THE FRONT NOT ADOPT ALL OF THEIR PRINCIPLES, THEY WOULD NOT JOIN.

TRADITIONALISTS ARE RAISING VARIOUS OBJECTIONS. THE CHRISTIANS ARE TAKING THE ATTITUDE THAT THEIR OWN "LEBANESE FRONT" IS THE ONLY "FRONT" IN LEBANON.

7. THE GOL IS TAKING A NONCOMMITTAL ATTITUDE. PRESIDENT SARKIS IS PROBABLY UNENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT A BROAD NATIONAL FRONT UNTIL SUCH TIME AS HE CAN UNDER HIS OWN LEADERSHIP PRESIDE A PROCESS OF NATIONAL POLITICAL RECONCILIATION.

8. COMMENT: THE SHATILA-SYRIAN EFFORT SEEMS TO BE STILLBORN, AS VIRTUALLY NO MAJOR LEBANESE POLITICAL FIGURES SEEM TO HAVE ANY INTEREST. WE SHARE EMBASSY DAMASCUS VIEW (REFTEL) THAT THE "BROAD NATIONAL FRONT" SEEMS TO BE SIGNIFICANT MOSTLY AS A SYRIAN MEDIA HAPPENING. CONFIDENTIAL

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WE FIND IT SURPRISING THAT SOME SYRIANS MIGHT HAVE REALLY HOPED TO GENERATE A PROCESS OF POLITICAL REUNIFICATION IN LEBANON USING SUCH A MINOR FRINGE FIGURE AS SHATILA. IN ANY CASE, THE OBVIOUSNESS OF HIS SYRIAN SPONSORSHIP PROBABLY ASSURES HIS FAILURE IN THE LEBANESE POLITICAL CONTEXT. IF, HOWEVER, SHATILA'S BRIEF FLARE ON THE BEIRUT POLITICAL SCENE AT LEAST PROVOKES RENEWED EFFORTS ON THE PART OF MOSLEMS AND LEFTISTS TO GET THEMSELVES TOGETHER, OR ON THE PART OF CHRISTIANS, MOSLEMS AND LEFTISTS TO BEGIN A SERIOUS POLITICAL DIALOGUE ABOUT THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF LEBANON, SOMETHING POSITIVE MAY HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED. WE SHARE THE GOL BELIEF, HOWEVER, THAT THE MOST HOPEFUL VEHICLE TO SUCCESSFULLY EFFECT POLITICAL RECONCILIATION IN LEBANON IS THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT ITSELF. PARKER

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